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Summary record of the 26th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 28 October 1999, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Galuška (Czech Republic)
later: Ms. Mesdoua (Vice-Chairman) (Algeria)

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00-22560 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 106: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family *(continued)* (A/C.3/54/L.9/Rev.1, A/C.3/54/L.11 and A/C.3/54/L.12)

Draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.9/Rev.1

1. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.9/Rev.1 entitled "Implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons: towards a society for all in the twenty-first century", which had no programme budget implications.

2. **Ms. David** (Philippines) announced that Algeria, Austria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chile, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Eritrea, France, Ghana, Guinea, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Jordan, Liberia, Luxembourg, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, San Marino, Sierra Leone, Spain, Sudan, Suriname, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Viet Nam had joined the sponsors of the draft resolution. Oral revisions to the draft resolution had been proposed at an earlier meeting.

3. *Draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.9/Rev.1, as orally revised, was adopted without a vote.*

Draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.11

4. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.11 entitled "Cooperatives in social development", which had no programme budget implications.

5. **Ms. Enkhtsegtseg** (Mongolia) announced that Cameroon, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Finland, Guatemala, Indonesia, Italy, Liberia, Pakistan, Philippines, San Marino, Sierra Leone, Spain, Sudan and Tajikistan had joined the sponsors of the draft resolution and that the sponsors had proposed certain revisions. In paragraph 2, the word "*Adopts*" would be replaced by the words "*Welcomes* the elaboration of the draft". Paragraph 3 would be replaced by the following text: "*Requests* the Secretary-General to seek views from Governments on the draft Guidelines and to provide, if necessary, a revised version for adoption;". In paragraph 6, the words "to disseminate and utilize the guidelines" would be deleted.

6. *Draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.11, as orally revised, was adopted without a vote.*

Draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.12

7. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.12 entitled "Follow-up to the International Year of the Family", which had no programme budget implications.

8. **Ms. Elisha** (Benin) announced oral revisions to the draft resolution. In the fifth preambular paragraph, the passage starting with the words "such as the need to develop ..." should be deleted. In paragraph 1, the word "endorses" should be deleted. Paragraph 3 should be amended to read: "*Urges* Governments to continue to take sustained action at all levels on behalf of families, including studies and applied research to promote the role of families in development, and to develop concrete measures and approaches to address national priorities to deal with family issues;". Paragraph 4 should be amended to read: "*Recommends* that Governments should develop strategies and programmes aimed at strengthening the economic livelihood of families, which must be sustainable, and in this regard encourages the contribution of all relevant actors in civil society, including research and academic institutions;". At the end of paragraph 5, the following phrase should be added: "in order to promote technical assistance focused on the less developed and developing countries and to encourage the holding of subregional and interregional meetings as well as relevant research;". Paragraph 6 should be revised to read: "*Invites* the Commission for Social Development, when adopting its next multi-annual programme of work, to consider the possibility of undertaking a review of the global situation of families, bearing in mind that different types of family exist in different cultural, political and social contexts;".

9. She announced that Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Botswana, Cameroon, Congo, Croatia, Dominican Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, France, Gambia, Ghana, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Madagascar, Malta, Mongolia, Portugal, Russian Federation, San Marino, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Sierra Leone, Spain, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe had joined the sponsors of the draft

resolution and that Bangladesh, Burkina Faso and Nigeria had withdrawn from the list of sponsors of the draft resolution.

10. **Mr. Mowla** (Bangladesh) explained that his country had not been included among the sponsors of the draft resolution, so that it did not need to withdraw from the list.

11. *Draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.12, as orally revised, was adopted without a vote.*

12. **The Chairman** suggested that the Committee should recommend to the General Assembly that it should take note of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (A/54/59). The Committee had thus concluded the consideration of agenda item 106.

Agenda item 108: International drug control *(continued)* (A/C.3/54/L.20)

Draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.20

13. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.20 entitled "International cooperation against the world drug problem", which had no programme budget implications.

14. **Mr. Campuzano** (Mexico) announced that Belize, Cambodia, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Georgia, Haiti, Jordan, Kuwait, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Namibia, Philippines, Solomon Islands, Swaziland and Togo had joined the sponsors of the draft resolution.

15. *Draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.20 was adopted without a vote.*

16. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had thus concluded its consideration of agenda item 108.

Agenda item 109: Advancement of women *(continued)* (A/C.3/54/L.16/Rev.1)

Draft resolution A/C.3/L.16/Rev.1

17. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.16/Rev.1 entitled "United Nations Development Fund for Women", which had no programme budget implications.

18. **Ms. Blajan** (Romania) announced that Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bhutan, Cambodia, Congo, Ghana, Haiti, Liberia, Peru, San Marino, Saint Lucia, Senegal, Solomon Islands, Spain, Swaziland, Togo and Venezuela had joined the sponsors of the draft resolution. She also announced several revisions to the text. In the fourth preambular paragraph, the order of the phrases "non-governmental organizations" and "United Nations organizations" should be reversed, so that the paragraph would start with the words: "*Welcoming* the contributions the Fund has made in supporting initiatives of Member States, United Nations organizations and non-governmental organizations ...". In paragraph 7, the words "and non-governmental organizations" should be deleted. In the same paragraph, the words "the national level" should be replaced by the words "all levels", so that the paragraph would read: "*Encourages* the Fund to continue to assist Governments in implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in order to advance gender equality at all levels, including by reinforcing the cooperation between Governments and civil society, especially women's organizations;".

19. *Draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.16/Rev.1, as orally revised, was adopted without a vote.*

Draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.19

20. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.19 entitled: "Improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat", which had no programme budget implications.

21. **Ms. Paterson** (New Zealand) announced that Belize, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Spain, South Africa and Togo had joined the sponsors of the draft resolution.

22. **Ms. Arbar** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that, although her country had usually co-sponsored the resolution, it was unfortunately not able to do so on that occasion. It hoped to be able to do so in the future.

23. *Draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.19 was adopted without a vote.*

Agenda item 115: Right of peoples to self-determination *(continued)* (A/C.3/54/L.25)

Draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.25

24. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.25 entitled "Universal realization of the right of peoples to self-determination", which had no programme budget implications.

25. **Mr. Bhatti** (Pakistan) announced that Bangladesh, Lebanon and Mauritania had joined the sponsors of the draft resolution.

26. *Draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.25 was adopted without a vote.*

Agenda item 112: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (A/54/98, A/54/265, A/54/411, A/54/419 and A/54/430) *(continued)*

27. **Ms. Nguyen Thi Thanh Ha** (Viet Nam) welcomed the fact that, as at 1 August 1999, 191 States had ratified or acceded to the Convention, as well as the recent consideration of the issue of children and armed conflict by the Security Council and its resolution 1261 (1999). In addition, the issues of children and poverty, children and sanctions, and exploitation or abuse of children should be seriously addressed. In 1991, Viet Nam had promulgated its Law on Protection, Care and Education for Children and had made every effort to enforce it. In addition, provisions to protect children's rights and interests had been incorporated in the Labour Code, the Civil Code, the Law on Amendments to the Criminal Code, the Law on Nationality and the Law on Marriage and Family.

28. The highest priority was given to the promotion and protection of children's rights to health and education. The programme of vaccination against the six childhood infectious diseases had covered 100 per cent of the nation's communes. Within the framework of a programme for malnutrition prevention, the rate of malnutrition among children had been reduced by 30 per cent over the past two decades. Viet Nam had been working to implement its policy of compulsory primary education and to increase enrolment rates at higher levels. Education accounted for 10 per cent of the national budget and the Government had always encouraged all sectors of society and international organizations to continue to provide resources for educational development, particularly in the remote and disadvantaged areas.

29. The Government of Viet Nam was strongly committed to providing assistance to children of poor families who were roaming the streets in search of work. The mass organizations had undertaken several projects to assist those children financed by the Government, the business community and international organizations. In addition, drug abuse was reaching alarming proportions in schools. The Government had formulated a comprehensive national drug control programme, which included a component of special protection for children based on preventive and curative measures.

30. Viet Nam had been actively implementing its National Programme of Action for Children to the Year 2000, despite the many constraints and challenges arising from the country's socio-economic situation, the regional financial crisis and the process of globalization. Besides lingering problems such as child malnutrition in the rural areas, school drop-outs among children of poor families, crowded classes and poor recreational facilities for children, the Government had to deal with emerging problems such as child abduction for illicit sale and abuse, drug abuse among children, etc. That task required not only further determination and efforts by the Government but also continued international support and assistance.

31. *Ms. Mesdoua (Algeria) took the Chair.*

32. **Mr. Vienravi** (Thailand) said that his country's Constitution and national legislation reflected the great importance which it attached to the promotion and protection of the rights of children. The 1997 Constitution extended compulsory education from nine to twelve years. Important laws had been enacted such as the 1997 Act on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Women and Children and the 1998 Labour Protection Act, which raised the minimum working age to 15, limited working hours for children and introduced safeguards against sexual abuse of child employees. For the first time in Thai history, the 1997 Constitution and the 1999 Education Act provided equal learning opportunity for children with disabilities. Special plans were being made to provide all schools throughout the nation with facilities for disabled children.

33. Despite national efforts, there was still a serious problem of trafficking in children and smuggling of

immigrant children. In order to address that problem, it was necessary to address the problem of poverty and lack of development in the area. Thailand needed the help of the countries of origin of the immigrant children, as well as of international organizations and United Nations agencies. Preventive efforts needed to be redoubled. The Office of the National Commission on Women's Affairs had in 1996 established the National Committee on Trafficking in Women and Children. The Committee was drafting a memorandum of understanding to foster cooperation between Thailand and Cambodia and, in that connection, Thailand expressed profound appreciation to the Government of Cambodia for its cooperation. Thailand hoped to be able to establish similar cooperation with other countries in the region.

34. Thailand was genuinely concerned about the increase in child sex tourism in developing countries. That problem also needed to be addressed from the demand side, and it was encouraging that a number of Governments had enacted laws to punish those who committed child sexual abuse overseas.

35. With regard to children and armed conflicts, Thailand provided education to children fleeing armed conflicts in neighbouring countries, regardless of their status or nationality. In certain places along the frontier of Thailand with other countries, children from those countries were allowed to commute to Thailand for the purpose of schooling. Thailand reiterated its support for the work of the Secretary-General's Special Representative and of relevant United Nations bodies. It also supported the effort to raise the minimum age for participation in hostilities from 15 to 18. Thailand therefore hoped that the optional protocol would soon be finalized and put into effect.

36. With regard to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Thailand had withdrawn its reservation to article 29 in 1997 and was currently studying the possibility of withdrawing its reservations to articles 7 and 12. Public discussions had been held to exchange views among the parties concerned on that matter.

37. **Ms. Neskorozhana** (Ukraine) said that, in addressing the issues of the sale of and trafficking in children, one of the basic problems was the lack of clear definitions, which resulted in confusion, difficulties in drafting legislation and weak enforcement mechanisms. It was therefore essential to make progress in the drafting of an optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The provisions of that document should strengthen and complement the Convention and not merely reaffirm existing standards. The final text of the protocol should be a consistent document and not a replica of existing international instruments or those under discussion elsewhere and should enable States to act effectively against the scourges which it dealt with. Special attention should also be given to the problem of child labour, since according to the statistics there were about 250 million children working from a very young age. In that connection, her delegation welcomed the adoption by ILO of the Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

38. With regard to the impact on children of armed conflicts and their recruitment into the armed forces, the work of the Secretary-General's Special Representative dealing with that question was appreciated, as was the work of UNICEF and the increasing attention being paid to that problem by the Security Council, which should be maintained. Children without education, economic security and family life – often the poorest of the poor whose only security had been the gun – would not be able to build institutions of peace when they grew up. Her delegation supported the work of the Working Group of the Commission on Human Rights which was drafting an optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

39. The special session of the General Assembly to be held in 2001 and other related events would provide a unique opportunity to review the achievements, analyse the main factors inhibiting progress and consider the remaining challenges. It was therefore important to have active and wide participation by all parts of the United Nations system, under UNICEF leadership, in the preparatory work for that session.

40. At the same time, it was the national Governments which should play the leading role in the effective implementation of the existing international instruments in that area. For that reason, the Government of Ukraine accorded top priority to the fulfilment of its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and implementation of the World Declaration for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the relevant Plan of Action. A number of new programmes had been formulated to improve the status of children in

Ukraine, which had included detailed information on those measures and efforts in its first periodic report submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

41. **Mr. Baali** (Algeria) said that, despite the progress made in improving the situation of children, 12 million children under five years of age still died of preventable diseases, 250 million were working in subhuman conditions and about 300,000 were involved in armed conflicts and, according to the latest UNICEF report, millions of children were illiterate. However, mention should be made of achievements such as the adoption by ILO of the Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and the current drafting of two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the excellent work done by Mr. Otunnu, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

42. Perhaps more than on any other continent, the situation of children in Africa gave rise to concern, since African children were seriously affected by malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, poverty and armed conflicts. Nevertheless, Africa had been a pioneer when it had adopted, in 1979 at Monrovia, the Declaration on the Rights and Welfare of African Children, which established rules governing the promotion and realization of the rights of children. Similarly, the Heads of State and Government meeting at Algiers for the thirty-fifth Conference, had appealed for ratification of the African Charter on the Rights and the Welfare of the Child, and decided to establish a special committee on the situation of children in armed conflicts.

43. Algeria had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993, thus supplementing national legislation designed to achieve full development of children. The Constitution guaranteed the right to free and compulsory education for the basic nine-year cycle as well as for those who upon completing that cycle were unable to pursue secondary studies. Enrolment rates in primary schools were as high as 99 per cent for boys and 89 per cent for girls. Children also received free medicines and the State prohibited exploitation of child workers, setting the minimum age for employment at 16. Gender-based discrimination was also prohibited and punishable.

44. The authorities had adopted various measures including: establishment of a system to monitor the rights of mothers and children; formulation of a national plan to follow up the World Summit for Children; preparation of a guide for children to familiarize them with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the national legislation on the subject; introduction of a national communications programme in cooperation with UNICEF in the sectors of health, education, social welfare, youth and sports; and a course to publicize human rights, democracy and republican values. In 1999, the Ministry of Education had inaugurated the first class of civic education in the culture of peace and non-violence. Lastly, Algeria had signed the African Charter on the Rights and the Welfare of the Children, demonstrating its commitment to the promotion and protection of the rights of children.

45. **Mr. Moniaga** (Indonesia) said that, despite the advances in technology, science and medicine, millions of children throughout the world continued to live in hazardous conditions. Poverty was at the root of many of the problems currently facing children and often forced them to choose between working or starving. Indonesia was therefore deeply concerned about the problems relating to the exploitation of child labour. Some 80 million children under 15 years of age were currently working and approximately 2 million children under 18 years of age were involved in prostitution.

46. The international community, which professed concern for the rights of children, nevertheless allowed them to drift in poverty, unable to meet their needs. Indonesia fully supported the efforts made seriously to address child labour, not only through legislation but also through specific measures. Although poverty could not be accepted as a justification of child labour, it had to be recognized that it was its root cause. The Government of Indonesia had initiated comprehensive inter-sectoral programmes to end child labour and ratified ILO Convention No. 138, which was essential for the effective abolition of child labour, and a national tripartite secretariat under the coordination of the Minister of Labour had been carefully examining Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour with a view to its ratification.

47. Despite the economic crisis, progress had been made in the promotion and protection of children's rights and the Coordinating Ministry for People's Welfare was coordinating the activities of the various government agencies, on the basis of the National Plan of Action for implementing the World Declaration for

the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. In addition, 79 non-governmental organizations dealt with the protection of the rights of the child and had established an independent national commission on child protection, which was supported by the office of the UNICEF representative in Jakarta and had 17 branch offices throughout the country focusing on the establishment of trauma centres to assist children suffering from internal displacement and civil violence. Those centres, supported by the Government and the non-governmental organizations and receiving assistance from United Nations bodies, operated in the area of recovery and were designed to reintegrate children into a normal social environment.

48. Research conducted by the Government, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations and the UNICEF office, had created greater awareness of the many cases of sexual exploitation of children and paedophilia in certain tourist resorts. In response, the Government and the national commission had formulated a national action plan on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, mobilizing society to focus on that problem.

49. It was encouraging to note that the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in its tenth year, had been ratified by 191 States; the Committee on the Rights of the Child had contributed a great deal to its implementation. It was regrettable that the optional protocols to the Convention had still not been finalized. Indonesia therefore believed that States should contribute constructively to the negotiations on those protocols and thereby strengthen the Convention.

50. **Mr. Regma** (Nepal) emphasized the important role played by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in creating awareness of the principles and provisions of the Convention. Nepal supported the medium-term plan for 1998-2000 adopted by the Executive Board of UNICEF in September 1998, which included among its priorities reduction of the impact of armed conflict on children and prevention of family separation. It also welcomed the recent adoption by ILO of a new Convention on the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

51. Nepal had been one of the first countries to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Constitution reflected its commitment to the provisions of that instrument. Gradual arrangements were being made for free education and labour laws had been enacted prohibiting child labour, as well as a Children Act. In addition, Nepal had formulated a Child Development Action Plan with specific targets for 2000 and was fully committed to the resolutions adopted at the Child Conference organized in 1986 by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. However, those various legal provisions had not succeeded in completely eradicating malnutrition, illiteracy and economic and social hazards, because the root problem of poverty and other social ills had not been solved. A large number of children were still dying of preventable diseases and, as shown by recent studies, about 31 per cent of children were still deprived of the opportunity for primary education. The studies also showed that infant and child death rates were still very high.

52. Aware of those realities, the Government of Nepal had formulated policies and programmes for the protection of children within the framework of the five-year plan for the period 1997-2002. The rights of children and their welfare and development were an integral part of Nepal's national development programme, which emphasized the enforcement of legal criteria for child labour, guaranteed primary education and encouraged children's involvement in activities contributing to their self-improvement. The role of non-governmental and social organizations was important in that process. In addition, the institutional arrangements for coordination, monitoring and evaluation of those activities had been extended and safe motherhood and vaccination campaigns had been intensified. The Government planned to establish juvenile benches within existing courts in the country's five development regions.

53. **Mr. Wenaweser** (Liechtenstein) noted that the tenth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child would occur in two weeks' time and mentioned the impressive speed of ratification of that instrument. Although the goal of universal ratification established in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action had not been met, 191 States had ratified the Convention, which was an unprecedented achievement. An important parallel development was the evolving awareness of the rights of children and of the dismal conditions in which children in many parts of the world lived, and the greater attention paid to phenomena such as child labour, armed conflict and sexual exploitation. In that connection, mention should be made of the

important work of UNICEF, of the Special Rapporteur and of the Secretary-General's Special Representative. Nevertheless, although those issues had moved higher on the international agendas, that had not increased respect for the rights of children. The suffering of children worldwide continued unabated and in many respects the situation had deteriorated.

54. In many matters on the United Nations agenda, and particularly in the area of human rights, a wide gap could often be observed between legal norms and implementation. It was therefore important and timely for an "era of application" of international norms to be launched, to quote the words of the Secretary-General's Special Representative. While United Nations specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations could contribute to the launching of that era, the primary responsibility lay with Member States. The full application of existing standards of human rights and humanitarian law would dramatically improve the situation of children. It was therefore necessary to achieve almost universal commitments to those standards and participation and accountability in that regard of non-State actors, who could have a strong impact on the situation of children and who often operated outside the confines of international law. The entry into force of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court would undoubtedly make a major contribution in that respect. It was increasingly understood that children's rights could not be seen in isolation but should be viewed in a larger context of situations which posed a particular threat to those rights. The attention which the Security Council had given to that question and the adoption of its resolution 1261 (1999) were milestones in that respect. It would be crucial for the Security Council to follow up that resolution by integrating children's issues into its daily work and paying attention to the interests of the child in such crucial areas as post-conflict peace-building, child soldiers and sanctions.

55. **Mr. Hadjiargyrou** (Cyprus) endorsed the statement made by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union, welcomed the reports of the Secretary-General on the item and expressed deep appreciation for the efforts of the Secretary-General's Special Representative, the Special Rapporteur, UNICEF, UNESCO and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Cyprus also joined previous speakers who had welcomed the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and reiterated its support for the important work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. It was through the concerted efforts of Governments, international organizations and civil society that the situation of the world's children had been substantially improved over the past decade. That progress had been registered primarily in the improvement of medical care, the elimination of or substantial reduction of many diseases and the reduction of infant mortality. Yet challenges still remained and more action was needed. Cyprus therefore welcomed the initiative of the Security Council to debate the question of children in armed conflict earlier in 1999. It also welcomed the contribution made by UNESCO through the formulation of strategies to prevent exploitation of children on the Internet, since it was essential that the free flow of information should not place children at greater risk of sexual exploitation.

56. Since the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960, the Government had consistently pursued the welfare of children and had thus achieved significant reduction of diseases and infant mortality, as well as total elimination of malnutrition and of major communicable diseases. Cyprus was considered a child-centred society, as measured by societal values, parental involvement in their children's well-being and the constant pressure exerted on the Government to devote more resources to children. Children's protection had been and continued to be a priority for the Government. Existing national legislation was extensive and effective. Cyprus was a party to many international agreements, had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and was one of the signatories of the World Declaration for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children adopted at the World Summit for Children.

57. There was an ongoing effort to keep legislation, policies and programmes for children in line with those two international instruments. After ratifying the Convention, the Government had set up a central committee in 1991 to monitor its implementation in Cyprus. One of the areas in which the Government had been particularly successful was administrative decentralization with the aim of providing a comprehensive educational, cultural, health and social model for children throughout the country. It was noteworthy that there was no child exploitation or sexual exploitation in Cyprus, that education was

compulsory until the age of 15 and free of charge, that there were over a hundred community centres for children, that 13.5 per cent of the national budget was devoted to education and that the Government subsidized children's programmes run by non-governmental organizations. The Government had recently prepared a Plan of Action for Children which would cover a five-year period and would further integrate the principles of the Convention in the education system and enhance children's awareness of their rights. In addition, school curricula had been revised to increase the emphasis on health education and greater attention had been given to pre-primary education and special education in order to promote the integration of children with special needs, while priority had been given to programmes to inform children of the dangers of drug abuse.

58. Regrettably, the Turkish military occupation of one third of the island was preventing Cyprus from applying that Plan of Action in certain areas, especially in the case of Greek-Cypriot children, who were deprived of their fundamental right to education because of their ethnic origin. Upon finishing elementary school, the Greek-Cypriot children in the occupied areas had no access to secondary education and had to be separated from their parents in order to pursue secondary studies in the Government-controlled area.

59. As the end of the decade approached, nine years after the World Summit for Children, Cyprus could be proud of the success achieved and of its initiatives, both national and international, to promote the goals of the Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action. However, much more had to be done to achieve all the goals of the Plan of Action. Progress in primary education had not kept pace with population increases, illiteracy was rampant in many parts of the globe and phenomena such as malnutrition, maternal mortality, AIDS and exploitation of children still existed and required immediate action. Endemic poverty in many parts of the world and new forms of exploitation and violence against women and children presented new challenges which the international community had an obligation to address. Cyprus stood ready to do its part.

60. **Mr. Gorita** (Romania) associated himself with the statement made by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union and expressed appreciation for the work of the various United Nations organs on behalf of children. However, ten years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, much still remained to be done both in the world and within the international organizations. The tenth anniversary of the Convention and the preparatory work for the special session of the General Assembly to be held in 2001 could result in specific measures at both the national and international levels to achieve practical implementation of the rights of children. That cause would undoubtedly be greatly advanced by the adoption of additional protocols to the Convention concerning the involvement of children in armed conflicts and the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Romania also welcomed the recent adoption by ILO of Convention No. 182 on the Prohibition of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

61. Since 1997, when the Government of Romania had established a Department of Child Welfare, there had been rapid structural reforms in that area. In 1997, a government strategy had been adopted for the period between 1997 and 2000, based on respect for all the rights of the child and concentrating on reform of the legislation on child protection, decentralization of activities in that area, restructuring and diversification of the specialized institutions, promotion of family placement alternatives to institutionalization, prevention of child abandonment and strengthening of the function of civil society. Between 1997 and 1999, urgent measures had been taken to reorganize the system of adoption, provide protection to children in difficult situations, establish criteria for the accreditation of private bodies dealing with the rights of children and define the profession of mother's aide to assist families in difficult situations.

62. With regard to decentralization, child protection commissions had been established to prevent situations which could affect the child's development or result in institutionalization, as well as to facilitate children's return to their families. The Department of Family Welfare had provided support, including financial support, to that decentralization process and had concluded agreements of association with other government departments. Associative relationships had also been established with non-governmental organizations, which were essential for the effective implementation of those policies. Another of the Government's important objectives was the reorganization and diversification of welfare agencies, which involved the creation of family-centred agencies, maternal centres, child care centres and other social,

medical and educational facilities. Support was also being provided to families and there had been a reduction in the number of institutionalized and abandoned children, with encouragement for integration of children in their family or adoption. Special attention was also being given to training of the personnel implementing the reform and to the required change in mentalities and in the role of the State.

63. Reference should be made to the financial support received from the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the World Bank, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other organizations. Although the results of those policies had not been spectacular, they had soon become apparent since, for example, the number of children admitted to orphanages had decreased by 30,000 in 1999 and the number of children receiving special protection within their own families had increased. The Romanian authorities, aware of how much remained to be done in that area, planned to enact a special law on the protection of children.

64. Romania was pursuing those policies with the support of United Nations organs, especially UNICEF, which had adopted a new programme for Romania for the period 2000-2004. Romania attached great importance to that programme, designed to enable the most vulnerable and marginalized children to grow up within a family and it was therefore ready to give active support to its implementation. Lastly, it was to be hoped that the United Nations and its Member States would redouble their efforts to make the rights of the child become an indisputable reality in the coming millennium.

65. **Ms. Al-Haddad** (Kuwait) said that, since children represented the world's future, nations should attach the highest importance to them, as was confirmed by the efforts of each country to protect children and guarantee a better future for them. Yet children were still suffering throughout the world, and measures at the international level were therefore also required. Kuwait noted with appreciation the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, which represented a step forward in improving their situation, and the reports of the Special Rapporteur and of the Secretary-General's Special Representative. The international community should, on the occasion of the forthcoming anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, renew its determination to protect the future of children.

66. Kuwait was particularly interested in those questions because its Constitution proclaimed the role of the family as the nucleus of society and gave special attention to mothers and young people. Kuwait believed that the State should protect children, particularly those suffering from disabilities. On 1 October each year, it celebrated Arab Children's Day, on which government institutions organized activities to publicize children's problems and provide health education, activities in public schools and courses to make people aware of the need for children to live in surroundings conducive to their development. In addition, the State provided education free of charge up to university level and universal health care. The health of mothers and young people was a matter of concern: efforts were made to promote a healthy environment, hygienic conditions and regular medical visits for women both during and after pregnancy. Lastly, she emphasized the importance of full respect for the international instruments concerning children and especially the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

67. **Ms. Afifi** (Morocco) said that it was regrettable that, while the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was being celebrated and although it had been ratified by almost all countries, children were still the victims of discrimination and ill-treatment, despite the many actions taken by the United Nations and Member States. Each year over 12 million children under five years of age died of disease and malnutrition, about 140 million did not have access to basic education and over 250 million were exploited in inhuman working conditions, especially in developing countries. According to ILO figures, over 60 million children under 15 years of age were working in deplorable conditions, over 2 million children under 18 years of age were involved in prostitution and, if current trends continued, in Africa the number of children obliged to work would exceed 100 million in 2015.

68. Children, moreover, were the ones most affected by the growing number of armed conflicts in the world, of which they were at once the targets, victims and instruments. During the previous decade, nearly two million children had died as a result of armed conflicts, another six million had received serious injuries or had become disabled and more than two million had been made homeless. More than 10 million children suffered from the terrible direct consequences of war, especially from rape, being forced to provide sexual services,

maiming and social rejection. Fifty per cent of the 48 million refugees or internally displaced persons were children. Morocco welcomed the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 1261 (1999), which marked an important milestone in the protection of children in situations of armed conflict.

69. Morocco regretted the persistence of practices such as the sale of children and their use for purposes of prostitution and pornography. Since its independence, Morocco had pursued a national policy aimed at protecting and guaranteeing children's rights. In Islamic countries such as Morocco, respect for the rights of all persons was a moral and religious obligation. The principles of Islam had prohibited slavery 14 centuries earlier and guaranteed children all their rights, including before birth. In compliance with those principles, Morocco had amended its laws and established mechanisms to guarantee children the conditions necessary for their physical and mental development. The Ministry of Human Rights was working to bring national laws into line with the provisions of the Convention.

70. In addition, the Government of Morocco had adopted such measures as the establishment of a State Secretariat for Family and Child Welfare and had charged the Parliament with the task of elaborating strategies to improve the situation of children throughout the country, in accordance with the principles of the Convention. The Assembly had held two sessions that year devoted to children. In Morocco, public education was free so as to enable the largest possible number of children to attend school and the subject of human rights had been introduced in the school curriculum. As part of the activities to mark the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, the Ministry of Human Rights, in collaboration with UNESCO, had organized in February 1999 a regional conference on the situation of children in Arab countries.

71. Morocco was one of the first countries to have signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which it had ratified in 1993. In keeping with its international commitments, it supported the Programme of Action for the Elimination of the Exploitation of Child Labour, which had been adopted by the Commission on Human Rights, and had recently signed ILO Convention No. 138, which prohibited the admission to employment of minors under the age of 15. Through cooperation with UNICEF, Morocco had made important advances in the implementation of its National Programme of Action for the Protection and Development of Children and was pursuing another programme of cooperation whose principal objective was to promote the implementation of the Convention.

72. **Mr. Oda** (Egypt) said that protecting the rights of the child was the moral duty of all countries, irrespective of their level of scientific, economic or social development. Egypt was one of the first States to have acceded to the Convention and had proclaimed the period from 1989-1999 as the National Decade for the Protection of the Rights of the Child. It had also established a National Maternity Council. Egypt, moreover, attached special importance to the protection of children in especially difficult situations, such as orphans, the disabled and the disadvantaged. Another matter of concern to his country was child labour. Egypt had reservations about the attempts being made to exploit the humanitarian aspect of that phenomenon, which hindered the efforts of States to put an end to the practice and to rehabilitate its victims. The problem should be viewed from a much broader perspective and in a global context. It was closely related to the problem of poverty and the right of peoples to development. Occupational training programmes should be organized to improve the situation of children who did not attend school and were obliged to work. Donor countries should fund such programmes and ILO and UNICEF should continue their efforts to come to grips with the problem of child labour, especially in the developing countries. In that connection, note should be taken of the major role played by UNICEF in the defence of children in Egypt.

73. Despite the significant gains made during the current decade, problems still remained which affected children, such as economic crises, the worsening debt crisis, the spread of epidemics and, in particular, armed conflicts. Egypt wished to reiterate its view that the General Assembly should establish broad policies and elaborate guidelines for the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. It was of the utmost importance to approve at the earliest possible opportunity the optional protocols in that field and, in particular, to set a minimum age for recruitment into armed forces. It was equally important to adopt without delay an optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. In that connection, note should be taken of the recent actions of the

General Assembly in follow-up to the World Summit for Children. Lastly, Egypt appealed to international organizations and to the international community to continue their efforts to protect children.

74. **Ms. Tomič** (Slovenia) said that Slovenia subscribed to the statement made by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union. It also wished to reiterate its support for the work of the Special Representative and for the recommendations which he had made in his report. Her delegation very much appreciated the country-oriented approach which the Special Representative had adopted. Cooperation with UNICEF and other United Nations agencies and organizations was necessary to ease the plight of children in situations of armed conflict. Slovenia strongly supported the extension of the Special Representative's mandate.

75. The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was a major achievement that compelled everyone to strive for a higher standard of legal protection for children during and in the aftermath of armed conflicts. Slovenia strongly supported efforts to raise to 18 years the minimum age for the direct or indirect participation of children in armed conflicts and hoped that the Working Group which was drafting an optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict would complete its work by January of the following year. Regional activities should be encouraged in order to give impetus to the elaboration of an effective international normative framework for the effective elimination of children's participation in combat.

76. The Slovene delegation was pleased to note some positive developments such as the adoption of ILO Convention No. 182. It looked forward to the early entry into force of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and applauded in particular the explicit exclusion of children under the age of 18 years from the Court's jurisdiction and the designation of the recruitment of children as a war crime. Slovenia looked forward to the progressive strengthening of the Statute in any future review process. It also welcomed the inclusion in the Statute of specific grave forms of crimes with sexual elements, both as war crimes and as crimes against humanity. It was also important to recall that the provisions of article 6, paragraph 5, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights should be adhered to both in times of armed conflict and in peace time.

77. She hoped that truly universal acceptance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child would be achieved in the shortest time possible. States Parties should regularly review their reservations with a view to their possible withdrawal. In that regard, the Slovene delegation was pleased to inform the Committee that in March of the current year Slovenia had withdrawn its only reservation to the Convention, namely, the reservation concerning paragraph 1 of article 9.

78. The work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child continued to enjoy the full support of Slovenia, which was in the process of finalizing its second periodic report on the implementation of the Convention and found the Committee's recommendations on its initial report to have been extremely useful. The majority of those recommendations had been acted upon. Lastly, she wished to announce that the Slovene Parliament had ratified the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights.

79. **Mr. Deffray** (Switzerland) said that it was necessary first and foremost to implement the Convention and other relevant instruments. Vigorous measures in the social, economic and humanitarian fields should be adopted to protect children, promote their development and, ultimately, guarantee the protection of the higher interest of the child, which was one of the guiding principles of the Convention. The situation of children affected by war caused particular concern and was one of the greatest challenges facing the international community. In that connection, Switzerland supported the awareness-raising activities being conducted by the Special Representative. It also welcomed the fact that the Security Council had considered the question and had adopted a resolution containing specific measures and recommendations on the matter.

80. It was also necessary to address certain deficiencies in the legal framework. In that connection, Switzerland sincerely hoped that the following year, which would mark the tenth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention, would see the adoption of the optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

81. The first optional protocol to the Convention would help to correct one of its weaknesses, since the Convention did not prohibit the direct participation in

armed conflicts of children between the ages of 15 and 18 years. Moreover, because of their age, such children were the most vulnerable to indoctrination or narcotic drugs and thus most likely to become victims of grave violations of international law. Switzerland therefore wished to underscore the importance of raising to 18 years the age at which children could be recruited or could participate in armed conflicts. The protocol, moreover, would not be a provisional solution but would become a permanent part of the Convention. The international community should therefore not content itself with half measures which, in any event, would be binding only on those States that were already Parties to the Convention. In that regard, Switzerland supported the initiatives of the coalition of non-governmental organizations to prevent the use of child soldiers, which had succeeded in mobilizing the international community through regional conferences. Switzerland also firmly supported the adoption of an optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and was convinced that it would be a useful complement to the various national legislative provisions, while at the same time streamlining procedures for judicial cooperation and extradition.

82. **Mr. Nikiforov** (Russian Federation) noted that the international community would shortly be commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, an instrument whose importance could never be overstated, since it was the first universal instrument to recognize the rights of the child and the need to provide children with special protection and assistance. Unfortunately, those principles were not always respected in practice and some of the harsh realities that characterized the contemporary world were the hunger, disease and violence that ravaged children and the wars, which were caused by adults but affected mainly children. Because of the new characteristics of contemporary conflicts, more than 90 per cent of victims were civilians, of whom at least half were children, who in turn accounted for more than 65 per cent of refugees and internally displaced persons. Those cold figures masked the immense human suffering endured by the children themselves and by the international community, which should categorically reject the recruitment of child soldiers. The Russian Federation therefore welcomed Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) concerning children in armed conflicts and was of the view that the elaboration of the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child should be finalized as early as possible in order to raise the minimum age of recruitment.

83. The Russian Federation shared the view contained in the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (A/54/430) that, ultimately, the best way to protect children was to prevent conflicts before they occurred or to resolve them before they assumed destructive proportions. That was precisely the objective of the Russian Federation's initiative to elaborate a "concept of peace for the twenty-first century", which would make possible a century without violence and give an important place to the humanization of international relations based on recognition of the human rights of all and on reducing human suffering as much as possible. The Russian Federation wished to emphasize the important role of education in promoting respect for human rights, peaceful settlement of disputes, tolerance and non-discrimination, which were no doubt essential for the promotion and protection of the rights of children. Abandonment, drug addiction, the sale of children and sexual exploitation, including on the Internet, had become bitter realities. In that connection, the Russian Federation supported and attached great importance to the work of the Special Rapporteur and endorsed her proposal for the elaboration at the earliest possible date of the optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

84. In the Russian Federation, the promotion of the rights of children was based on the Convention's provisions. The new laws which had been promulgated in the country included a federal act that guaranteed the rights of children and designated the protection of those rights as a priority area for Government action. One of the most acute problems, which had been unknown thus far in the Russian Federation, was that of abandoned children, which had led to the introduction of a federal programme and to the promulgation of various urgent measures to be implemented under another federal act that laid down the principles for preventing the abandonment of children and juvenile delinquency. Despite its economic difficulties, the Government of the Russian Federation was striving to provide social assistance to the most disadvantaged sectors and to children in particular. In view of the limited resources at its disposal, that assistance was being provided on the basis of the income level of families, with a view to

meeting their basic needs and ensuring the development of children. Priority was always given in the national budget to programmes designed to help children, even though sufficient resources were not always available. It was for that reason that, on 1 October 1999, the President of the Russian Federation had given instructions for 6 million rubles to be transferred from the Reserve Fund of the Office of the President to children's homes, welfare shelters, rehabilitation centres for children and adolescents and special centres for handicapped children.

85. In the current difficult period of Russia's history, international cooperation was surely more important than ever, all the more so because such cooperation had already yielded excellent results. For example, an experimental project had been launched in 1998 in collaboration with UNICEF to formally create within the regional administration the post of officer in charge of children's rights. The Russian Federation had recently submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child a report on its activities in that field and it was a source of satisfaction that, despite the fact that a number of observations had been made which his Government would take into account, the second periodic report had been favourably received since, notwithstanding its current economic difficulties, the Russian Federation had made definite progress. As the twenty-first century dawned, it should not be forgotten that the future depended on children, who must demonstrate greater goodness, wisdom and justice than their parents had done. It was the responsibility of each of them to defend the rights of children and thus to make a better future possible.

86. **Mr. Rabuka** (Fiji) asked for more time to be allocated in future to the dialogue between the experts and States' representatives when the Committee discussed controversial issues. The tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was an opportune time to consider what steps had been taken to date to implement the provisions of the Convention and the constraints that had impeded the realization of its objectives. In implementing the Convention, Fiji had found that the family played an important role in teaching children the importance of culture, moral values and discipline, since, in a rapidly changing community and world, the role of the family continued to be very relevant. Even though the current emphasis was no longer on the nuciear family, parents should instil principles of responsible citizenship in their children and monitor their attitudes and behaviour. Regrettably, the weakening of family units had resulted in a high percentage of young people being in prison or involved in drug or alcohol abuse. An increasing number of children were also to be found in the street. Fiji believed that the root cause of those problems was poverty and that, unless steps were taken to eradicate it, particularly in small island States, it would be impossible to protect the rights of children. Poverty struck at the nutrition and health of children as well as their right to education, since it forced them to drop out of school and become victims of child labour.

87. While Fiji had demonstrated its willingness to deal with those issues within its available financial and human resources, it regretted the lack of support from the international community, which it therefore urged to assist small island States by improving market access for their products, expanding preferential treatment arrangements and promoting institutional capacity-building to enable them to enjoy the opportunities of globalization. Even though States had the primary responsibility for implementing the Convention, given the decline in official development assistance, the international community should assist those States that lacked the economic and human resources to fulfil the obligations which they contracted under international instruments.

88. Since 1993, Fiji had taken various steps to implement the Convention: establishment of a unit within the Department of Social Welfare and Policy to deal with the problem of child abuse; institutionalization of a policy on child abuse in all health institutions; review of existing legislation to ensure that the special needs of children were taken into account; coordination of training programmes by the Ministry of Education and non-governmental organizations to counsel secondary school students and families about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse; provision of free education for children up to the age of 15 years; and amendment of tne Penal Code to provide for stiffer sentences.

89. Through the Commission on the Court System, the Government had recognized the need to, *inter alia*, improve the existing Juvenile Act, prosecute juvenile offenders only as a last resort, create a police unit to assist juveniles, employ a mechanism of meetings with the families of young offenders and use greater discretion in courts in the sentencing of young offenders. Steps had been taken to implement some of

the recommendations which had limited financial implications, but considerably more resources were needed to implement all of the Commission's recommendations.

90. All of that clearly showed that, despite its limited resources, the Government of Fiji was committed to ensuring full enjoyment of the rights of children in Fiji, since it had put in place administrative measures and legislation to guarantee the fulfilment of its obligations. It was therefore disconcerting to hear Ms. Santos' comment about his Government's lack of awareness of the problem of sexual abuse of children in Fiji. In her response to the statement made by Fiji, Ms. Santos indicated that she had seen the pornographic exhibits related to the Mutch case, which, presumably, had been give to her by the prosecution. Fiji was of the view that such information should be privy only to the officials of the judicial system who were handling the case. The mere existence of such allegations was not representative and did not justify any conclusion that commercial sexual exploitation of children was rampant in the country, since Fiji believed that a fundamental requirement of the judicial system was the verification of evidence before the appropriate court.

91. The State's duty was to ensure the protection of not only the rights of victims but also those of the accused, as in the case of Mr. Mutch, who should have his day in court. It would be a sad day if Ms. Santos were to accept as gospel truth from one source only hearsay evidence of the sexual exploitation of children without the verification of that evidence by a court. Given the shortness of her stay in Fiji and the lack of facts and figures to accurately reflect or confirm the truth of the claim of child abuse, such a conclusion could not be drawn without a proper evaluation. In those circumstances, the delegation of Fiji wished to place on record its disappointment over the report of Ms. Santos and its doubts about the Special Rapporteur's integrity and her ability to objectively carry out her mandate in the current instance.

92. **Ms. Kourula** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that nearly half of the world's 21 million refugees were children, more than 50 per cent of the 240,000 Somali refugees and a similar percentage of the 57,000 Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia were below the age of 18 years. In Conakry, Guinea, 140,000 of the 240,000 refugees were younger than 18 years, while nearly half a million of the 1.2 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan were children. In Rwanda, more than 300,000 children who were unaccompanied or separated from their families had been displaced and relied on assistance from UNHCR and UNICEF. Children also accounted for a significant proportion of the displaced persons in Kosovo and East Timor.

93. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was the primary human rights instrument and the necessary starting point. All of its articles were equally applicable to refugee children, while the current refugee instruments lacked specific provisions on children. The task of UNHCR and its partners was to ensure recognition that human rights law was equally applicable to the protection of uprooted children and that a rights-based approach was the essential basis on which to extend protection to refugee children.

94. The root causes of refugee displacement were invariably linked to conflict, persecution and the denial of human rights. Refugee children, like adults, fled to escape war and were the easiest victims of human rights abuses, since, according to a United Nations study, they were not just innocent bystanders caught in the crossfire of armed conflict, but were victims of calculated genocide, forced military recruitment, gender-related violence, torture and exploitation on a systematic and massive scale.

95. From the Congo to Sierra Leone, from northern Uganda to Sri Lanka, in Afghanistan and Colombia and on the Thai/Myanmar border, military and armed groups actively recruited children, either to take a direct part in hostilities or to force them to carry out various activities. Europe also had its share of involvement of children in armed conflict. The recruitment of girl children as suicide bombers in Sri Lanka, as human shields in northern Uganda or as mine clearers in Iraq is equally preoccupying.

96. A number of States had responded to the plight of refugee children through a range of governmental and non-governmental activities. The reintegration of refugee children into their communities often had its own set of complications. The initiative for the repatriation of children from Liberia, a collaborative programme involving UNHCR, UNICEF and non-governmental organizations, provided one example of a rights-based approach to programming. One of the key projects under that initiative was the rebuilding of the education system in Liberia.

97. Rights-based programming for children also existed in Europe. The programme for separated children in Europe, a joint UNHCR/International Save the Children Alliance project, had been created to address the rights of refugee children in Europe. The detention of minor asylum-seekers in a number of developed countries was also of concern to UNHCR. Detention facilities were often not adapted to the needs of detained minors, who were kept in prison-like environments with no access to education. UNHCR had consistently urged that detention should be used as a last resort, in accordance with its guidelines.

98. The principle of the best interest of the child underscored the protection of refugee children. The Committee on the Rights of the Child had an important role to play in monitoring that the best interest of the most vulnerable among refugee population groups was respected.

99. **Mr. Goonetilleke** (Sri Lanka) said that the proportion of civilian victims had increased from 5 per cent to over 90 per cent, with two million children dying in the previous decade as a result of armed conflicts and over one million made orphans. It had been reported, moreover, that some 300,000 young persons under the age of 18 years were being used as child soldiers around the world. Those alarming figures demanded urgent corrective measures by the international community.

100. An examination of the root causes of the exploitation of children showed that poverty was at the top of the list and that it could not be eradicated by legislation. It was the primary cause of child labour, child prostitution and other practices that affected the future and well-being of children. The Executive Director of UNICEF had stated that 650 million children were trapped in poverty and that 130 million children in developing countries did not attend school. Two thirds of that number were girls who would become mothers within a few years and raise their children in poverty. In order to eradicate child labour, poverty must be eradicated, a task that should be the first priority.

101. The Sri Lankan delegation had listened with great interest to the presentations made by officials of ILO and UNICEF, the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and fully supported the work of Ms. Santos.

102. In paragraph 40 of her report, the Special Rapporteur referred to the situation in Sri Lanka. It could not be denied that child prostitution existed in Sri Lanka, as it did in many other countries. However, as the Special Rapporteur herself had pointed out, the Government of Sri Lanka was taking action to combat the problem. The figure provided in the report, moreover, appeared to be a gross exaggeration and the view expressed in the document about a "sense of fatalism" seemed to reflect a lack of proper understanding of the situation in the country. The Department of Probation and Child Care, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the Tourist Board, was promoting public information campaigns to combat prostitution. The following measures, among others, had been put in place to protect the rights of children: the Penal Code had been amended earlier in the year to prohibit the use for purposes of prostitution of minors below the age of 18 years; the National Child Protection Authority had been established in June 1999 to advise the Government on issues relating to child abuse; and regulations had been promulgated in 1998, making it compulsory for parents to send their children between the ages of 5 and 14 years to school. Primary, secondary and tertiary education was free and the Government provided free uniforms and text books to children attending school.

103. On the issue of children in situations of armed conflict, Sri Lanka supported the proposal contained in paragraph 45 of the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to raise the age limit for recruitment into armed forces from 15 years to 18 years. Indeed, Sri Lanka's legislation provided that 18 years was the minimum age for enlistment, which was voluntary. It was a fact, however, that rebel groups, such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, frequently recruited children as soldiers, a situation which Sri Lanka had repeatedly brought to the attention of the Special Rapporteur and other United Nations officials. He shared the view expressed in the same paragraph about the urgent need to mobilize a major international movement to put pressure on the armed groups that were currently abusing children by forcing them to be combatants.

104. In paragraph 78 of his report, the Special Representative had encouraged the development of

regional advocacy, commitments and initiatives for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. Even before the establishment in 1985 of the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the countries of the region had identified the well-being of children as one of the priority areas of cooperation between them. To that end, they had held a number of meetings on the subject of children, such as the ministerial meetings held in India in 1986, in Sri Lanka in 1992 and in Pakistan in 1996. Member countries had also elaborated a draft regional convention against trafficking in women and children for prostitution, which was to be signed the following month in Katmandu at the SAARC Summit of Heads of State and Government, and a convention on regional arrangements for the promotion and protection of child welfare in South Asia, which was due to be considered by the SAARC Foreign Ministers at the Katmandu meeting.

105. Finally, at its ministerial meeting held in Pakistan in 1996, SAARC had proclaimed the objectives of, *inter alia*, reducing the fertility rate to or below replacement levels, reducing malnutrition among children under the age of five years and eliminating the use of child labour by the year 2010. The United Nations must recognize that South Asia had a programme of action to improve the situation of children in the region. The problems were enormous, but a modest beginning had already been made.

The meeting rose at 6.25 p.m.